

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PARIS 11324 01 OF 02 161733Z

43

ACTION EUR-12

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R 161720Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9952

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 11324

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT FR PGOV

SUBJECT: CENTRISTS' VIEWS ON GISCARD AND CHIRAC

SUMMARY: DURING SEPARATE CONVERSATIONS, TWO CENTER DEMOCRAT DEPUTIES HAVE PORTRAYED PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC'S APPOINTMENT AS MAJORITY "COORDINATOR" AS FORCED ON GISCARD BY CIRCUMSTANCES. THESE WERE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH, IN THEIR VIEW, THE PRESIDENT COULD HAVE AVOIDED BY MORE ADROIT HANDLING OF THE MAJORITY IN THE MONTHS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING HIS ELECTION. THEY SAW THE NEW CHIRAC ROLE AS AUGURING A MORE "GAULLIST" APPROACH TO DOMESTIC PROBLEMS, BUT FELT THAT THE TWO MAJOR REFORMS NOW BEFORE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY--CAPITAL GAINS TAX AND CORPORATE REFORM--WOULD BE PUSHED THROUGH, ALBEIT IN WATERED-DOWN FORM. NEITHER DEUTY THOUGHT CHIRAC'S COORDINATING EFFORTS WOULD CHANGE SIGNIFICANTLY MAJORITY PROSPECTS FOR THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. NEVERTHELESS, THEY SEEMED TO FEEL THAT WITH A LITTLE GOOD NEWS FROM THE ECONOMY THE MAJORITY COULD STILL PREVENT A LEFT TAKE-OVER IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. END SUMMARY.

1. GISCARD AND THE MAJORITY -- BOTH DEPUTIES ASCRIBED THE CHIRAC APPOINTMENT AS COORDINATOR TO MISTAKES WHICH GISCARD HAD MADE EARLY IN HIS TERM OF OFFICE. WHILE THEIR EMPHASIS DIFFERED, THE COMMON JUDGMENT WAS THAT

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARIS 11324 01 OF 02 161733Z

THE PRESIDENT HAD ERRED IN NOT BRINGING THE GAULLISTS

UNDER CONTROL EARLY ON. ONE PARLIAMENTARIAN FELT THAT THE TACTIC SHOULD HAVE BEEN TO BALANCE THE UDR BY FORCING REFORM-MINDED ELEMENTS IN THE MAJORITY TO UNITE. THIS WOULD HAVE PRODUCED A TWO-POLE MAJORITY, I.E., THE UDR AND REFORMERS (CURRENT CENTER PARTIES PLUS THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS). THE OTHER DEPUTY FELT GISCARD SHOULD HAVE IMMEDIATELY ESTABLISHED HIS AUTHORITY BY FORCING THE UDR TO ACCEPT CERTAIN POLICIES. REGIONAL REFORM WAS A CASE IN POINT. IF THE PRESIDENT HAD PUSHED THE CONCEPT, THE UDR WOULD HAVE EVENTUALLY GONE ALONG. DEBRE AND THE BARONS WOULD HAVE SCREAMED, BUT THE PRESIDENT WOULD HAVE COME OUT THE WINNER AND CLEARLY THE MASTER OF HIS OWN HOUSE. AN ADDITIONAL BENEFIT WOULD HAVE BEEN THAT REGIONAL REFORM PROBABLY WOULD HAVE ATTRACTED SOCIALIST SUPPORT AS WELL, PRODUCING THE SORT OF "CENTER" MAJORITY (AT LEAST ON THIS ISSUE) THAT THE PRESIDENT SO OFTEN CLAIMED AS HIS GOAL.

2. GISCARD AND CHIRAC -- BUT INSTEAD, THE PRESIDENT WASTED HIS TIME WITH POLITICAL "NONENTITIES" SUCH AS SENATOR CAILLAVET (DEFECTOR FROM THE LEFT RADICAL PARTY) AND ERIC HINTERMAN (HEAD OF SMALL MODERATE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY). IN ADDITION, HE PAID TOO MUCH ATTENTION TO GAULLIST SENSIBILITIES AND NEVER CREATED THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS GOING TO GOVERN THE COUNTRY IN ACCORDANCE WITH POLICIES HE HIMSELF HAD LAID DOWN. THUS WHEN THE CANTONALS SHOWED MAJORITY LOSSES TO THE LEFT THE GAULLISTS SENSED THAT THAT COULD FORCE THE PRESIDENT TO CHANGE COURSE. THE RESULT WAS CHIRAC'S NOMINATION AS MAJORITY COORDINATOR.

3. CHIRAC THE COORDINATOR: BOTH DEPUTIES DOUBTED THAT CHIRAC'S APPOINTMENT AS COORDINATOR WOULD MAKE ANY REAL DIFFERENCE IN MAJORITY PROSPECTS FOR THE 1977 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS OR THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE CONTESTS. ONE TERMED THE APPOINTMENT ANOTHER GISCARD "GADGET," I.E., A STOP-GAP MEASURE DESIGNED TO PLACATE THE UDR. THIS IN ITSELF WOULD NOT SOLVE THE REAL PROBLEMS FACING THE MAJORITY. THE OTHER SAW THE APPOINTMENT AS A PERSONAL DEFEAT FOR THE PRESIDENT; GISCARD HAD BEEN FORCED TO INDEBT HIMSELF

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 11324 01 OF 02 161733Z

STILL FURTHER "TO THE MAN TO WHOM HE ALREADY OWES HIS 1974 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION VICTORY."

4. THE CENTER: NEITHER DEPUTY WAS SPARING IN HIS CRITICISM OF HIS OWN POLITICAL FORMATION. BOTH WONDERED IF THE CENTRISTS WOULD EVER EXTRACT THEMSELVES FROM THEIR OWN QUARRELS LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE THEIR WEIGHT FELT ON THE POLITICAL SCENE. CENTRIST LEADERS HAVE NEVER LEARNED

THE CRITICAL LESSON THAT IT IS BETTER TO BE NUMBER TWO OR
THREE IN A PARTY THAT MEANS SOMETHING THAN NUMBER ONE IN
YET ANOTHER SPLINTER GROUP. JEAN-JACQUES SERVAN-

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PARIS 11324 02 OF 02 161732Z

43

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 11324

SCHREIBER'S RECENT L'EXPRESS EDITORIAL ATTACKING CHIRAC
(PARIS 10733) WAS AN EXAMPLE. SOMETHING CONSTRUCTIVE
COULD HAVE COME FROM CENTER DISCONTENT WITH CHIRAC AND
WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S REFUSAL TO PERMIT A POLITICAL
DEBATE IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (PARIS 10502). INSTEAD,
JJSS DID HIS TYPICAL LONE RANGER ACT AND QUEERED THE
DEBATE FOR ALL CONCERNED. NO POLITICIAN, THEY SAID,
WANTS TO BE SEEN FOLLOWING JJSS, NO MATTER HOW POPULAR
THE ISSUE.

5. COMMENT: THERE IS CONSIDERABLE WISHFUL HINDSIGHT IN
THESE VIEWS, ESPECIALLY AS THEY RELATE TO PRESIDENT
GISCARD'S OPTIONS VIS-A-VIS THE GAULLISTS. WITH HIS
NARROW VICTORY IN THE 1974 PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST, IT IS
DOUBTFUL THAT THE PRESIDENT COULD HAVE SUCCESSFULLY
RESHAPED HIS MAJORITY IN THE FASHION DESCRIBED ABOVE.
NEVERTHELESS, THESE THOUGHTS ON THE PRESIDENT'S RELATIONS
WITH THE GAULLISTS ARE IN KEEPING WITH THE OFTEN HEARD
CRITICISM THAT THE PRESIDENT IS NOT PROVIDING THE LEADER-

SHIP WHICH THE MAJORITY REQUIRES.

6. THE CENTER DEMOCRAT PARTY, OF WHICH MINISTER OF JUSTICE LECANUET IS PRESIDENT, HAS ACCEPTED THE CHIRAC APPOINTMENT WITH PUBLIC GOOD GRACE. NEVERTHELESS, IT
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PAGE 02 PARIS 11324 02 OF 02 161732Z

SEEMS CLEAR THAT THE PARTY REMAINS PRIVATELY CONCERNED OVER WHAT THE APPOINTMENT MEANS FOR FUTURE POLICY, ESPECIALLY IN THE AREA OF REFORM. ELSEWHERE IN THE CENTER, THE RADICAL SOCIALISTS HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE VOCAL IN PUBLICLY EXPRESSING THEIR CONCERN OVER THE NOMINATION, AND CHIRAC HAS MADE A SPECIAL EFFORT TO CALM THEIR SUSPICIONS. THE LATEST EXAMPLE WAS HIS APRIL 15 APPEARANCE BEFORE THE PARTY'S EXECUTIVE BUREAU. IN RESPONSE TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S ASSURANCES THAT HE WOULD RESPECT THE "PERSONALITIES" OF THE VARIOUS MAJORITY PARTIES AND THAT THE MAJORITY WOULD CONTINUE TO PURSUE REFORM, THE EXECUTIVE BUREAU PASSED A RESOLUTION INDICATING ITS SUPPORT FOR THE "COORDINATOR" CONCEPT. IT WAS NOT A TOTAL VICTORY FOR THE PRIME MINISTER, HOWEVER, AND APPROXIMATELY ONE THIRD OF THE BUREAU MEMBERSHIP ARE CALLING FOR A FULL PARTY CONGRESS TO CONSIDER THE PARTY'S POSITION ON THE ISSUE. END COMMENT.
RUSH

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